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Mexico Aide Says Mining of Ports Is Counterproductive

U.S. Talks With Nicaraguans Urged by Foreign Minister

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Mexican Foreign Minister Bernardo Sepulveda yesterday told Secretary of State George P. Shultz that the mining of Nicaraguan ports is a "counterproductive act" and that the United States can best reduce tensions with Nicaragua by withdrawing its pressures and beginning negotiations with that country's leftist Sandinista government.

A senior U.S. official described the position presented by Sepulveda after a day of talks between top U.S. and Mexican officials preparing for a meeting here May 15 between President Reagan and Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid.

The Shultz-Sepulveda meeting came amid widening differences over Reagan's policy toward Central America but the senior U.S. official said both countries were determined not to permit disputes about El Salvador and Nicaragua to harm cooperation in other fields.

Both the U.S. official, who briefed reporters on condition he not be identified, and Sepulveda, who met with a small group of reporters last night, sought to emphasize the positive side of the meeting. Sepulveda stressed that the emphasis was not on quarreling but on exploring possible mutual ways of resolving tensions in Central America.

However, there was no question that Mexico still views with alarm the U.S. emphasis on military solutions in the region. Similarly, the senior official made clear, Shultz rejected "politely but firmly" the Mexican call for negotiations with Nicaragua and for ending the civil war in El Salvador through direct talks between the government and its leftist guerrilla opponents.

The senior official said Shultz suggested that Mexico and the other three Latin American countries participating in the so-called Contadora process postpone their April 30 deadline for initialing a draft treaty to resolve tensions in Central America.

Mexico is a leader of the Contadora group, which includes Venezuela, Colombia and Panama. The group is seeking to act as "honest brokers" in working out a grand design for bringing peace to the region and ending interference from the outside. Foreign ministers from the four countries are to meet April 29 in hopes that a draft treaty acceptable to the Central American countries will be ready for initialing.

However, the senior official indicated, the United States believes that deadline is unrealistic. The official said, "It is not in our interest, we believe, nor is it in the interest of the Contadora process, that Contadora may flounder because it is seen as not being able to meet a deadline."

The official said Sepulveda had agreed to consider Shultz's call for a delay. However, the foreign minister said last night he had no recollection of that idea being discussed and indicated that Mexico will press for keeping to the schedule.

Sepulveda came here after delivering a sharp public attack on U.S. complicity in the mining of Nicaraguan ports and U.S. refusal to accept the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice in the dispute.

Yesterday's meeting also followed reports that some administration officials are advocating a get-tough approach to alter what they regard as de la Madrid's overly sympathetic attitude toward Nicaragua and the Salvadoran insurgents. These officials reportedly had argued for using U.S. aid to de la Madrid's financially hard-pressed government as a lever to force Mexico to be more supportive of U.S. positions in Central America.

But Sepulveda said there was no hint of such U.S. pressures in yesterday's day-long talks that covered the entire range of U.S.-Mexican relations. The senior U.S. official also denied strongly that the administration plans such an approach. He noted that Mexico's financial fortunes bear directly on U.S. economic interests, and said that "enlightened self-interest" obliges the United States to do everything it can to keep Mexico "strong, free and prosperous."

Sepulveda also stressed the theme that, despite differences over Central America, the two countries wish to keep their relations and cooperation as close and cordial as possible. He said that "the atmosphere was very cordial and fluid" both during a brief meeting with Reagan at the White House yesterday morning and the subsequent meetings with Shultz, Treasury Secretary Donald T. Regan and other senior U.S. officials.

"Do you want me to go on a background basis and say it was a tense meeting?" he asked in his meeting with reporters. "That doesn't correspond to reality. There was no mood of tension."

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Sepulveda acknowledged that he had stressed "the basic principles of Mexican foreign policy that the use of force against the territory or sovereignty of another country is a violation of the principle of non-intervention and is unacceptable."

He said Mexico was not necessarily insisting that there be bilateral negotiations between the United States and Nicaragua. But he left no doubt of his government's belief that the United States is only making the situation worse through its support of anti-Sandinista guerrilla forces operating against Nicaragua from neighboring Honduras.

The U.S. official described the positions laid out by Sepulveda as a "restatement" or "reiteration" of policies that Mexico long has advocated. Other U.S. officials said earlier there had been little expectation that the two countries would be able to bridge their longstanding differences over Central America.

Mexico considers itself a revolutionary society; and the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party, which dominates Mexican politics, is under constant pressure from its left wing to take a protective attitude toward radical governments and movements in the region.

That has been a source of frequent annoyance to many administration officials who consider Mexico too tolerant of Cuban and Nicaraguan efforts to spread subversion in the hemisphere and too willing to harbor spokesmen for the Sal-

vadoran insurgents. Some U.S. officials believe that the struggle in El Salvador could spread north into Mexico and someday confront the United States with a communist-influenced presence on its southern border.

However, the administration also is aware that Mexico is the third-largest customer for U.S. exports, that the economy of the American southwest is heavily dependent on commerce with Mexico and that a Mexican financial collapse would send severe shock waves into this country. The

senior official noted that Mexico's external debt of almost \$90 billion includes roughly \$25 billion owed to U.S. institutions.

In addition, de la Madrid has been much more muted than his predecessor, Jose Lopez Portillo, in criticizing the U.S. role in Central America. That, coupled with U.S. hopes that the Contadora group ultimately may hold the key for resolving Central America's tensions, make it unlikely that the administration would try to push him too hard toward embracing U.S. policy.